

December 17, 2007

Travel Management Planning Team

Bitterroot National Forest

88 Main Street

Stevensville, MT 59870

RECEIVED

DEC 20 2007

Ravalli County Commissioners

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Comments on Proposed over the snow travel plan 2007

Your plan of the Bitterroot National Forest Travel Plan does not give legitimate reasons for closures for the forest. Therefore, we have to show proof why these areas need to stay open for winter use and why they should not be closed to all of the public.

All of these areas in the proposed plan have documented historical use for well over a century. What is the reason why you are trying to close these areas? If there is damage of some sort, do you have any evidence of said claims supporting this. It is proven that horse and cattle do cause damage in the forest areas.

Over snow travel creates little if any ground degradation, rarely disturbs the ecology of the area. There is some sound from snowmobiles but with all the new regulations the sound decibels need to be met at 50 feet. Snowmobiling sound occurs in limited areas of the high country. The vast majority of the forest is quiet. The more you concentrate snowmobiles, hikers, cross country skiers and snow-shoers with their loose dogs into a limited usage area, the more problems there are going to occur in the forest.

When considering wildlife habitat, winter activity is normally in elevations with heavy snow accumulations which is unsuitable for animal activity.

Winter recreation that is impacting areas to me with your closures include the following:

A PORTION OF BITTERROOT/ROCK CREEK DIVIDE TRAIL 313:

Trail 87 intersects Trail 313-A designated snowmobile trail back down Trail 102 to Mosquito Meadows. Snowmobiles come off the trail between Divide Creek and Shadow Lake to Frog Pond basin.

DARBY LUMBER SECTIONS 1, 3, 5,7,9,11,13 AND 15;

These sections of play area are exceptionally good for family use of all ages. This is easily accessible with no avalanche danger. With this area proposed for closure you will be concentrating snowmobiles into conflicts with other users. This is an excellent area for family play areas leave this area alone and open to snow users.

CAMAS AND KIDNEY LAKE;

This is a very high alpine experience and only of a few areas accessible on the west side of the Bitterroot National Forest. Your proposed wilderness is inaccessible from this area because of the terrain and high cliffs.

SKALKAHO DAM LAKE SEASONAL CLOSURE;

Roughly ten years ago, the Forest Service agreed to leave this area open during hunting season for snowmobiles. Skalkaho Highway was signed to let all hunters know of this. This is the only area on the forest that gives snowmobilers access to early snow conditions.

CONTINENTAL DIVIDE TRAIL BETWEEN LOST TRAIL PASS AND TRAIL 462 (BALSAMER) TO TRAIL 172;

Portions of this trail were originally to be left open as they are used to access Bender cabin from Hogan cabin. This area is easily accessed from several directions, including from the Beaverhead National Forest.

BLUE JOINT AREA;

This area is one of few high alpine areas for snowmobiling. Has access to Razorback Ridge area for a breath taking view of the surrounding areas of Idaho and Montana.

In my conclusion it would be that no closures should occur at all. Additional corridors for winter recreation should be made available. Leaving additional areas open to snowmobiling from Nez Perce to Magruder and on to Elk City, Idaho.

Your proposed wilderness areas are in very close proximity to private property. Some areas of this proposed wilderness is closer that $\frac{1}{4}$ mile to closer that one mile. What impact of fire control are you proposing for this? In your wilderness, you state that it is let it burn. So thus, does this mean that we are further having more fires in our back yard and our rural communities? What are your plans for irrigators accessing the lakes and doing irrigation dam maintenance?

There are many issues that need to be considered here. These are just a few. Your decision on the impact of a compacted forest for all types of recreational use will be in your hands. This decision will affect not just us but will impact all future generations.

Very little, if any, damage occurs with over snow travel. Studies have proven that snowmobiles do not affect wildlife.

Managing, rather than eliminating activities is the key element.

Sincerely,

Steve Goss

West Fork Road

Darby, MT 59829